

Higher Degrees by Research Procedure 4 Progress

Section 1 - Purpose / Objectives

(1) Nil

Section 2 - Scope / Application

(2) This Procedure outlines the submission and timing of Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) progress reports and the unsatisfactory progress process.

Section 3 - Definitions

(3) Lapsed status - Failure to re-enrol by the census date results in a lapsed status.

(4) Maximum duration - Represents the amount of time for which Commonwealth funding is provided for candidates undertaking a HDR program.

(5) Elapsed candidature time - The total amount of time a candidate has been enrolled in their research degree.

(6) Higher Degree by Research

Section 4 - Policy Statement

(7) Nil

Section 5 - Procedures

(8) The procedures for reporting and monitoring academic progress, and the conduct of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings are outlined in this procedure.

Part A - Progress Reports

Submission and timing of Progress Reports

(9) A candidate is required to submit an annual progress report. The Progress Report must contain their supervisors' contributions and be approved by their Principal Supervisor. Any proposed changes to the [Supervision Agreement](#) completed as part of the [Confirmation of Candidature](#) process should be declared on the Progress Report.

(10) All enrolled research candidates will receive an email notification via their @ live VU email account (copied to the Principal and Associate Supervisor/s) advising that the Progress Report must be completed two months before the due date. Regardless of whether or not the candidate receives the email notification, it is the candidate's responsibility to

ensure that their Progress Report is completed and submitted by the due date.

(11) All enrolled research candidates who have not commenced completing their report on line three weeks prior to the due date will be reminded that failure to complete a Progress Report will result in Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings being instigated against the candidate.

(12) The annual progress report need not be submitted if the candidate:

- a. has been enrolled in the coursework component of a professional doctorate;
- b. has submitted their thesis for examination;
- c. is on approved intermission, which has lasted for at least six months;
- d. has a lapsed status.

(13) In specific cases, the College or Graduate Research Centre (GRC) may determine that the candidate needs to submit additional progress reports. Circumstances which may give rise to such a determination include:

- a. a candidate exceeding the maximum duration of their degree;
- b. a candidate's progress being under formal review and/or monitoring through a Progress Improvement Plan.

(14) Unless specified to the contrary in the notice of the determination, a candidate submitting additional reports must still submit the annual Progress Report.

(15) International candidates are required in accordance with the [ESOS National Code of Practice](#) to submit biannual progress reports and will be advised at what time of year these reports are required.

(16) The Progress Report will specify a final due date. If a candidate requires an extension to the due date to submit the Progress Report or believes they should be exempt from submitting a report, they must apply for an official extension or exemption at least one week prior to the due date.

(17) The candidate will be advised in writing by the GRC of the decision regarding the official extension/exemption and the new date if appropriate.

(18) Evidence of submission of the Progress Report by the candidate to the Principal Supervisor will be considered to constitute submission of the report in cases where difficulty is being experienced in gaining Principal Supervisor and/or College sign off of the Progress Report.

(19) If a candidate has not completed a Progress Report by the due date, the GRC will commence Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings. Proceedings may be revoked by the College Support Officer (CSO) if evidence shows either the candidate is not responsible for the delay in submission or the Progress Report has now been submitted.

Grading of reports

(20) There are three main outcome categories for Progress Reports:

- a. Satisfactory
- b. Marginal; and
- c. Unsatisfactory.

(21) If progress is assessed as marginal by the College (and, where a candidate is based in a Centre or Institute, the relevant Centre/Institute) on the basis of the information or ratings provided in the Progress Report by the Principal Supervisor and/or candidate, candidates will be required to complete a Progress Improvement Plan in consultation with their Principal Supervisor for approval by the College Director, Research Training (and, where applicable, the

relevant Centre/Institute Director). In exceptional circumstances, where the candidate and Principal Supervisor have already provided a detailed action plan to address any issues in the Progress Report, the action plan may be accepted in lieu of a separate Progress Improvement Plan.

(22) Candidates with a marginal grade in a Progress Report will be required to complete a follow-up report in six months irrespective of load status. This process will be monitored by the relevant CSO.

(23) Where a candidate's progress is graded marginal in the follow-up report, the candidate's progress will be deemed unsatisfactory and Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings will commence against the candidate.

(24) Where a candidate receives an unsatisfactory grade in a Progress Report, Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings will commence against the candidate.

Part B - Unsatisfactory Progress

Grounds for Unsatisfactory Progress

(25) Unsatisfactory Progress within a HDR includes a candidate:

- a. failing to submit a Progress Report by the due date;
- b. receiving two successive Marginal grades or an Unsatisfactory grade in their Progress Report;
- c. failing to make satisfactory progress towards their research degree. This is defined to include:
 - i. failure to complete the Required Coursework component with an average of 70 per cent across the required units of study;
 - ii. failure to achieve candidature at the first or second attempt within set timeframes, as stipulated by [Confirmation of Candidature](#) procedures;
 - iii. exceeding maximum candidature duration;
 - iv. repeated failure to meet agreed timelines set in conjunction with the supervisor/s or as outlined in the Progress Report;
 - v. failure to adhere to any determination of the College/Centre/Institute or the GRC;
 - vi. repeated failure to meet with supervisor/s;
 - vii. inability (or apparent inability) to complete a thesis of appropriate quality within the required timeframe;
 - viii. failure to resubmit the thesis for re-examination within agreed timelines;
 - ix. failure to submit all the required components for the designated thesis format by the due date.

(26) Where a candidate is experiencing difficulties with progress it is occasionally deemed appropriate for candidates to convert enrolment from a doctoral to a masters by research degree, or from one type of doctorate to another. Failure to accept such a direction would trigger Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings.

Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings

(27) Where the College supports the commencement of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings against a candidate, the College Director, Research Training (and, where applicable, Centre/Institute) must inform the GRC and provide in writing:

- a. a summary of the basis of the Unsatisfactory Progress recommendation (see Clause [24] above);
- b. evidence (eg copies of progress report/s and outcomes, email/letter correspondence); and
- c. confirmation that the candidate's Principal Supervisor and/or the College Director, Research Training (or their representative) and, where applicable, the Centre/Institute Director, supports the instigation of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings.

(28) When the GRC receives notification in writing, the case will be reviewed by the Dean, Graduate Research and, if supported, the Unsatisfactory Progress Proceeding will commence.

(29) The GRC will send a written notice to each candidate who is the subject of an active Unsatisfactory Progress Proceeding. This notice will be sent to the current address of the candidate as recorded in the University student system, by registered mail as well as through the VU @live email account.

Unsatisfactory Progress Hearings

(30) If the candidate wishes the claim of Unsatisfactory Progress to be assessed and determined on its merits, a [Request for Hearing](#) form must be lodged within three weeks from the date of the written notice sent by the GRC (regardless of the exact date of its receipt by the candidate).

(31) If the candidate does not request a hearing within the three-week period, the candidate will be deemed to be making Unsatisfactory Progress and the GRC, with authorisation from the Dean, Graduate Research, will advise the candidate that their enrolment will be discontinued and will take effect after 20 University business days.

(32) Upon receipt of a request for a Hearing, a Panel shall be appointed to hear the matter and a Hearing will be scheduled, normally within two weeks from the date of the written notice sent to the candidate. The candidate will be provided with notice of the time and date of the Hearing.

(33) The Panel for a Hearing shall be comprised of:

- a. the Dean, Graduate Research or their nominated representative (normally College Director, Research Training from a College other than that of the candidate) to act as the Chair of the Panel;
- b. the College Director, Research Training from the candidate's College, or their nominee and, where applicable, the relevant Centre/Institute Director; and
- c. one College Director, Research Training or an experienced senior researcher from another College, as nominated by the GRC.

(34) The Panel will be supported by the GRC Compliance Officer (or their nominated representative) to take minutes and provide other required support.

(35) The candidate is encouraged to submit a written statement (no more than three pages) to the Chair of the Panel at least five working days prior to the Unsatisfactory Progress Hearing. The statement should describe any special needs or extenuating circumstances (including whether the candidate has registered for disability support) and attach supporting documentation.

(36) The candidate's Principal Supervisor and Associate Supervisor/s must attend and participate in the Hearing unless on extended leave.

(37) The candidate may attend the Hearing and may bring a support person or advocate to the Hearing. Such a person will be an observer only and will not form part of the Panel. Support is available from [Student Advisory Services](#).

(38) All persons attending a Hearing will be subject to the orders and direction of the Chair of the Panel.

(39) In the event that any person required to attend a Hearing is unable to attend in person, because of illness, absence abroad/interstate or other compelling reasons, they may participate by teleconference. Candidates may nominate a representative to attend the Hearing on their behalf. Support is available from [Student Advisory Services](#).

(40) The Panel will make a decision about the candidate's progress and ongoing candidature, taking into account only relevant factors. These factors include the previous candidature progress history, overall elapsed candidature time and the documented circumstances that have led to the Unsatisfactory Progress recommendation. The Panel may

make one of the four following decisions:

- a. Discontinuation of enrolment. The candidate will be given notice that the decision to discontinue will take effect after 20 University business days.
- b. Conditional Continuation of enrolment. This recommendation confirms that the candidate's progress is unsatisfactory. The Panel through the Chair will advise the candidate of the conditions that must be fulfilled in order to be permitted to continue their enrolment towards the degree. Conditions may include strict timetables for submission of work or submission of work to a suitable academic standard.
- c. Continuation of Candidature. This decision is available to the Panel if it judges, taking circumstances into account, that progress is either marginal or satisfactory.
- d. Course Transfer (for example from a doctoral to a research master's degree), where a transfer may be subject to ongoing conditions or monitoring requirements.

Outcomes of recommendations

Discontinuation

(41) If the Panel makes a decision for Discontinuation of enrolment, the GRC will notify the candidate that their enrolment will be discontinued and will take effect after 20 University business days. The Panel will advise the candidate of their appeal rights.

(42) A candidate who lodges an appeal will remain enrolled until an outcome regarding the appeal is determined.

(43) Candidates in receipt of a scholarship will be informed that their stipend payments will be ceased effective from the date of their discontinuation.

Conditional Continuation

(44) If the Panel makes a decision for Conditional Continuation of enrolment the candidate will be advised in writing of the conditions to be fulfilled to avoid their enrolment being discontinued. The candidate will be asked to sign an undertaking that they agree to the decision and will abide by any conditions or requirements placed on them by the Panel.

(45) If the candidate fails to sign and return the agreement within 10 University business days, the GRC will notify the candidate that their candidature will be discontinued by the GRC and will be effective after 20 University business days.

(46) The GRC Compliance Officer will monitor whether the conditions are being met and advise the candidate in writing 10 University business days prior to the end of the agreed period. At the end of the agreed period the Panel will reconvene to make a determination about whether the conditions have been met. The candidate will have an opportunity to make a submission to the Panel before it reaches its decision.

(47) If the Panel determines that any condition has not been fulfilled, then the Panel will forward the recommendation to discontinue the enrolment to the Dean, Graduate Research. The GRC will advise the candidate that their enrolment will be discontinued, and will take effect after 20 University business days.

(48) If the Panel determines that all of the conditions have been met, they will agree and approve that the status be changed to Continuation of Candidature.

Notification and records

(49) The candidate will be advised of the outcome of any Unsatisfactory Progress meeting or hearing at its conclusion and by formal letter within five University business days. International candidates must also be informed that the

University will advise relevant government departments and agencies of any unsatisfactory performance.

(50) A record of each individual hearing and outcomes will be retained on the candidate's official file maintained by the GRC. For international candidate a copy must also be included on the candidate's file at Victoria University International.

(51) A report of all hearings and outcomes in each calendar year will be prepared by the Dean, Graduate Research for presentation and discussion at the March meeting of the following year of the Research and Research Training Committee of the Academic Board.

(52) The GRC Compliance Officer is responsible for ensuring that any discontinuation event is recorded on all University systems.

(53) A Panel's decision in relation to Unsatisfactory Progress can only be appealed in accordance with the University's [Student Appeals Regulations](#).

Section 6 - Guidelines

(54) Nil.

Status and Details

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Responsible Officer	Andrew Hill Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research & Impact Andrew.Hill@vu.edu.au
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Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Higher Degree by Research (HDR)" - A Higher Degree by Research (HDR) is a postgraduate award at Master or Doctoral level at AQF 9 or 10 respectively, of which two thirds or more is research and research training. The major part of assessment of these courses must be in the form of reporting the outcomes of a research project/s conducted as the research component of the degree. A HDR may also include a coursework component, which is one or more accredited units of study designed to address and area(s) of content and/or skill development within the HDR program.